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12 January 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Debriefing of Mr. Daniel M. Braddock, Charge from U. S. Embassy in Havana

1. The undersigned attended a debriefing scheduled for 1500 hours, 11 January in Room 5518, New State Extension. In addition to Mr. Braddock, Mr. Wilma C. Bowdler, political officer, and Mr. Robert Sayer, economic officer from the Embassy were on the panel.

2. Mr. Braddock opened the debriefing by stating that U. S. Embassy relations with the CASTRO Government were poor at the start of 1959 and got progressively worse. He stated it was evident from the first that the CASTRO Government was determined to break down the United States' good reputation in Cuba and throughout Latin America and do everything possible to change the friendly attitudes that the Cuban people had for Americans.

3. Among the other items discussed were:

a. Break in Relations: Although Fidel CASTRO gave his first notice of the cut in American Embassy representation to 11 people during a broadcast on the evening of 2 January, the Embassy did not receive a note to this effect in writing until 0100 hours, 3 January. After querying the Cuban Government as to whether this 11 total meant only Americans and finding out that it did have to include any support details (chauffeurs, elevator operators), the Embassy recommended to the State Department that relations be broken off because it was impossible to see how our Embassy could operate under these conditions. During the departure period, it was evident that the Cuban Government could hardly wait to get their hands on property occupied by Americans. In some cases, Cubans were present in the homes while Americans were packing to leave. As of now, 3 State Department Officials are still in Havana and one in Santiago to draw up inventories of American property left in the official installations for the Swiss Embassy which is handling our relations with Cuba.

b. CASTRO Popularity: Although Fidel has lost a great deal of support in numbers, it is evident that his consolidation in government organization and influx of foreign arms has increased his strength and potential for combatting resistance. Mr. Bowdler estimated that perhaps only 25% of the people actively espouse CASTRO's policies. Offhand, they thought that 50% of the Cuban people are ambivalent and don't know what to do in the situation, and perhaps 25% would take active or passive measures against the Government if they had a chance.

c. Communist Control of Government: They estimate that the Communists have active control of the Government machinery primarily through second echelon figures who stay out of the limelight.

d. Guantanamo Bay: None of the gentlemen present could foresee CASTRO attempting to use force to seize our Naval Base at Guantanamo.

e. Economic Situation: Mr. Sayer estimated that manufacturing is down an average of 90% in Cuba and that if the bloc did not provide help, the industrial section of the economy would be on the verge of collapse. In the agricultural field, the situation is not as serious. Production drops range from down 2% on sugar production to down 50% on tomatoes. Mr. Sayer did not think that the Soviet bloc was breaking its neck to help the economy; that although they might provide enough to prevent a total collapse, it seems evident that the Cuban Government will not be able to maintain a pre-war standard of living level or a gross national product figure of pre-1959.

f. Popularity at the Campesino Level: On this matter it was pointed out that the biggest gain seemed to be a psychological one in that the Campesino has been given a feeling of importance. Fidel keeps citing that the Government needs the support of these people; in addition, their use in the militia and the issuance of arms to them increases their importance.

g. Oil Situation: Two of the three refineries expropriated by the Government are not operating at this time. No accurate figures on production were cited although it was noted that Soviet crude oil seems to be giving refinery operators a tough problem. It was pointed out that gasoline is not rationed; anyone with a car can get his tank filled up at the nearest gasoline station.

h. Anti-CASTRO Figures: On the question as to who has the best chance to lead the anti-CASTRO forces, Mr. Bowdler cited the fact that Tony Varona seems to have little following within Cuba. Bowdler made the point that all Cubans seem to be in favor of the revolution and social and economic reforms; that within this framework the principal argument is how to get the Revolution back on its original track. Bowdler felt that Manolo Ray seemed to offer the greatest promise of rallying popular support in Cuba.

i. Propaganda: Mr. Braddock stated that it was definitely necessary for the U. S. Government to step up its propaganda against Fidel. In particular, he cited need for more radio and leaflet air drop operations.

j. Cuban Army and Militia: CASTRO seems to have made clear that the militia is the favored element in the armed forces. The Army may be disgruntled about this but to date does not seem to have expressed acute

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dissatisfaction with the situation. It was pointed out that the Cuban Rebel Army Units lead the January 2 parade through Havana and still seem to be better armed and trained than any militia unit.

k. CASTRO and the Church: Mr. Bowdler was of the opinion that recent attacks on the Catholic Church were made because CASTRO feels that the Church influence in Cuba is weak. The Catholic Church does not seem to have the hold on people in Cuba that it does in some other areas in Latin America. It was pointed out that if CASTRO's measures against the Church become too severe, his efforts might boomerang.

l. Government Orientation: On the question as to when the CASTRO Government swung into the Communist orbit, Mr. Bowdler expressed the opinion that the period April through September 1959 was the critical moment. He thought that after Fidel returned from his trip to the United States an internal struggle between the moderates and the Communists during this period resulted in the Communists gaining the upper hand with Fidel leading the Government into the Soviet Bloc.

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